

Va. secures lease for 2 wind turbines off Va. Beach

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The state has secured a lease - the first of its kind in the country - to build a wind energy pilot project in federal waters off the coast of Virginia Beach, Gov. Terry McAuliffe announced Tuesday. It will allow a group led by Dominion Virginia Power to erect two turbines, each more than 500 feet tall, about 24 miles offshore.

The turbines, which are scheduled to start turning in 2017, would gather wind data that could lead to a bigger wind farm in that area. They also would generate power and send it through an underground cable that would come ashore at the Camp Pendleton State Military Reservation.

"This is an opportunity to become a global leader in offshore wind," McAuliffe said at a Hampton Roads Chamber of Commerce luncheon in Norfolk. He said the lease propels Virginia to the front of the pack of states striving to start offshore wind projects. It's the first wind power research lease issued by the U.S. Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, an agency spokeswoman said.

Last year, Virginia's was one of three wind power pilot projects funded by the U.S. Department of Energy. Dominion, which is part of the state group known as the Virginia Offshore Wind Technology Advancement Project, received a \$47 million federal grant to build and install the test turbines. The two 6-megawatt turbines will be able to produce energy to power 3,000 homes at peak demand, McAuliffe said. The main purpose of the pilot project is to learn lessons about turbine construction and wind patterns that could inform a larger project.

In 2013, Dominion won an auction to lease 113,000 acres of federal waters off Virginia Beach for a project that could include 200 turbines. The company has until 2018 to come up with a plan for a wind farm that officials have said could power up to 700,000 homes. Environmental groups praised the lease agreement.

"Today's news helps cement Virginia as a potential clean energy leader in the nation, and we applaud the McAuliffe administration for its support of renewable energy," Virginia League of Conservation Voters Executive Director Michael Town said in a statement. No offshore wind farms exist in the U.S., but about a dozen are being developed, including the Virginia Beach site. McAuliffe said his big goal is to make Hampton Roads - with its deep-water port - a hub for turbine manufacturing.

"It takes vision, courage and a lot of money to develop these turbines," he said.

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